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PP RUEHROV RUEHTRO
DE RUEHKH #0819/01 1891533

ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4058
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RHMFIS/CJTF HOA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000819

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SE GRATION, S/USSSES, AF A/S CARSON, AF/E
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ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/02/2014

TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC KPKO UNSC AU SU

SUBJECT: SRSG QAZI WARNS UNMIS UNABLE TO QUELL A MAJOR OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE IN ABYEI

Classified By: CDA Robert E. Whitehead, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. UNMIS will be able to quell localized incidents of unrest in Abyei, but it cannot guarantee the maintenance of order and the protection of all civilians if a major outbreak of violence occurs following the decision by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), UN SRSG Ashraf Qazi told CDA Whitehead in a meeting on July 8. Ultimately, the SAF and the SPLA must maintain control over proxy militias and other rogue elements outside of Abyei and the cohesion of Joint Integrated Units (JIUs) within, he said. He asked that the USG urge both sides to take up defensive positions North and South of Abyei to keep out troublemakers. Qazi also lamented that neither the NCP nor the SPLM have followed through on verbal commitments to ease the situation on the ground through extensive public outreach to their respective local communities. End Summary.

¶2. (C) One day after returning from Abyei, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Ashraf Qazi briefed CDA Whitehead on security preparations in advance of the anticipated July 22 ruling from the PCA in the Hague on the region's boundaries. UNMIS has beefed-up its presence in Abyei as well as its operating bases in Difra and Agok, he said, noting the increased visibility of UNMIS Armored Personnel Carrier (APC) patrols in all three locations. There are approximately 600 UNMIS personnel in Abyei, of which 300-plus are combat troops, he said. There are also UNMIS companies of 120 troops each in Difra and Agok, putting the total number of UNMIS combat troops in the Abyei area at over 1500.

¶3. (C) Qazi said that in conjunction with the JIUs and Joint Integrated Police Unit (JIPU), UNMIS is well-positioned to quell any individual or localized outbreaks of violence, such as demonstrations or looting. But if combatants begin to show up in significant numbers, UNMIS could be forced to take up a defensive posture. Ultimately, the UN force is an enabler, he said, and the primary responsibility falls on the NCP and the SPLM and their respective militaries to prevent large-scale armed conflict. Should the SAF and the SPLA fail to control proxy militias, or even worse, become involved in combat themselves, UNMIS would be hard-pressed to respond. To that end, Qazi urged that the USG persuade both parties to take a defensive posture to keep troublemakers out of the Abyei area. "The SAF should be facing North, while the SPLA should be facing South," he said.

¶4. (C) Qazi also discussed the possibility that the PCA decision might be postponed, an option the NCP has raised with several parties in Khartoum, and to which the SPLM reportedly objects. The argument for postponement is that the two parties need to assert more control over their proxies,

especially the Missariya Arabs, he said. On the other hand, UNMIS is "as prepared as it's going to be," and more time risks increasing tension and leading to more volatility down the road. The day of the announcement would likely be characterized by relative calm, Qazi said, given the presence of international VIPs and the fact that neither side would want the stigma of having its confederates cast the first stone. The real worry is what will happen a week or two after the announcement when the PCA's decision moves into implementation, he said.

¶ 5. (C) Qazi also noted that while both the NCP and the SPLM had publicly committed to easing the situation on the ground in advance of the PCA decision, "neither party has done much of anything." Public outreach in particular has been limited, and as a result, critical messages to Abyei's population about the sanctity of their rights regardless of the ruling are not being delivered. Given the lack of print media or television, UNMIS had proposed establishing radio broadcasts using Miraya FM (UN Radio), but this proposal was rejected by senior NCP officials in the MFA, he said. The parties have also done little to rein in their firebrands, an unsettling prospect, especially in the case of the SPLA, whose chain of command he described as "tenuous."

¶ 6. (C) Comment: With the PCA decision just two weeks away, both the NCP and the SPLM need to step-up their high-level presence and outreach in the Abyei area and take the necessary steps to ensure that their respective militaries secure the area from unwanted intruders. Qazi's assessment that UNMIS would not be able to quell a major outbreak of violence, similar to the heavy fighting between the SAF and

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SPLM in May 2008, assumes that this might occur in the period after the PCA ruling is announced, and not in its immediate aftermath, a judgment shared in Juba by UNMIS head David Gressley Postponement looks to be a two-edged sword that might allow more time to prepare the people of Abyei, if both the NCP and SPLM take action to do so, but might also increase internal tensions by putting off a decision that the population expects in two weeks' time .

WHITEHEAD